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WHERE HE IS

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WHERE HE IS

"That where I am, there ye may be also."

"Lo, I am with you alway."

BY

CLELAND B. McAFEE

PARK COLLEGE

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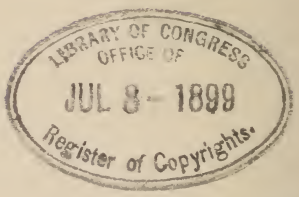

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I

OUR FUTURE HOME THE PLACE WHERE HE IS

"That where I am, there ye may be also."

One Sabbath evening, after a sultry day, I sat under the open sky with a small circle of friends trying to catch some of the coolness which the night brought. Among us was a famous theologian, dean of a divinity faculty, scholarly and refined in taste, and spiritually sensitive. He had preached that day and so had I, and out of sheer weariness, neither had taken much part in the conversation. Presently, in a lull of talk, he turned to me and asked, "What do you think is the greatest hymn in the English language?" Almost

immediately I replied, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me." "No," he said, "that is great, but there is a greater." Others suggested other hymns, until each member of the company had named one. Then we turned upon him, and asked his opinion. With a quiet eloquence that thrilled us and a tremor in the voice that added meaning to the words, he repeated the whole of the hymn beginning:

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride."

There was no argument when he had finished.

After a moment's stillness, I asked the veteran preacher and scholar a question which I have asked other men in other places. "What is the best prospect held before the Chris-

tian for eternity?" In the same subdued voice, but now with a ring of exultation in it, he answered, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." There was a sermon in the slight pause he made before the word "Myself," and before the word "ye." Read it again and stop an instant before each word. Do you not see that He is drawing our hearts to Himself and not to a place and not to a thing? Does not His infinite compassion come into view in saying that we are to be with Him?

The Christian's passing out of life is being received not into a place, nor unto a condition, but unto Himself—Heaven is "where He is."

How like Jesus it is to make companionship the chief attraction of heaven! There are many *things* we

shall want. Sometimes we are allowed to see what a royal condition awaits us. But it is not things that make a home. There is a touch that only a personality can put on things that turns a house into a home. Do you not remember how the new house is made homelike by the old faces? Surely you have noticed how the old house ceases to be home when a dear presence is gone out from it. The little ones wander about lonesomely among the familiar things, calling mother, and not finding her find not home. Just a while ago I passed the hours of sorrow with some dear friends who had seen a lad and a lassie carried out of their beautiful, almost palatial, residence. When some remarked upon the home, the stricken mother replied, "It is only a house now." And we understood her heart. The personal presence was gone.

WHERE HE IS

In his last book, Dr. George Frederick Wright has reminded us that the world cannot be mere mechanism—"The universe to be a perfect home requires the presence of the heavenly Father." It is absurd, he thinks, that any loving earthly father should attempt to build so commodious and beautiful a palace, that his children shall not care for his personal presence. So it is, and our Father has not so made heaven. Its chief attraction is, that it is where He is.

. . . . . .

Sometimes older brothers get engrossed in such large affairs and have such great enterprises on hand that younger ones annoy them. A moment ago a lad outside my window sent his little brother back from some expedition lest he should be in the way. He loved his brother, but he did not want him about. We

fathers tell our little ones to run away and play; we are busy. And the little ones look longingly around at the books and the manuscripts, but most of all at ourselves, and want to be with us, feel lonesome without us, just because they love us. We love them, too, but we are engrossed with large duties, sermons, books and the like. We cannot have them where we are all the time. After a while, when we throw the door wide open and call the little ones, how the feet come pattering!

Our older Brother, our Father, will not shut us out from any of His great enterprises. We shall not be "in the way." He has room enough in His heart for the care of the worlds and of us who are children of His. Plato said the gods could care for the great things, but not for the small. Jesus shows us that all

things are great with God when they touch His loved ones. Whatever marvellous works He may do in the future, whatever worlds may spring into being through His word, He has not forgotten us, but holds before us this as the eternal future—that we shall be where He is.

II

THIS EARTH-LIFE OUR PREPARATION FOR BEING WHERE HE IS

"Lo, I am with you alway."

We are to spend our future where He is. Do you remember He says that He will be where we are until that time? It is a most notable reversal. "I am with you alway." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Yonder, it is our companionship with Him. Here, it is His companionship with us. And if one companionship makes heaven worth while, the other makes earth worth while.

In our busy, grown-up lives we

forget how much this higher companionship of love means to us. Learn it again from the unspoiled child life. A certain little one, whom I have watched, often stops in her play and calls her father or mother only to hear an answer, when she goes on contentedly with her play again. She does not want anything, just wants to know whether the companionship is still unbroken. At times I have seen her carry all her playthings laboriously out of a pleasanter room into the one where her mother lay ill or sat sewing, not because the play would be pleasanter, but because it was in a loved presence.

Sometimes, when we kneel to pray, we cannot think of anything that we want, and we fault ourselves for it. But may it not be a child's longing for the companionship of love? Oh, for more hours

when we are not asking favors, but looking into His face, learning to have Him with us here that we may revel in the joy of being with Him there! A little while ago I read one of the old traditions of a monk who was so godly, whose life was so beautiful, that his comrades wondered and asked him what he did to develop in himself such grace of character. He was unconscious of it, and thought they misread his life. He did not pray more than they; he was not more careful and orderly in his devotion than were they; he knew not that his life outshone theirs. As days went on, they watched him, but could not learn the secret of the life he lived. At last it was observed that he stole away from the company each evening after the plain meal and was seen no more till morning. One day they followed him, and through the tiny

window of his cell they saw him lay a great volume of devotion before him, and by the light of a little taper read page after page. So he sat, absorbed in thought, until the midnight hour struck, when he looked up as though he saw a familiar friend close by, and said, "Dear Lord, there is the same understanding between us." Then he extinguished the light and went to his rest. His fellows caught the secret of an understanding between him and his Lord. It was no formal approach, it was no occasional communion, it was no routine of devotion, that glorified the life. It was an unbroken understanding between him and his Lord.

How much nearer our ideal of living it is to have "the same understanding" between us and Him! If we were walking up a mountain-side with a dear friend, we would often

want to exclaim over the beauty of the scene and the majesty of the ascent, but there would be little phrasing of the deepest pleasure of all, the very presence of the friend of our hearts. Looking back over such experiences we say, "The day was made doubly delightful by such a companionship." And he understood; he did not need to be told. Between kindred souls there is a magnetic sympathy that seeks no words, but feels more than words could express, if they were sought. A true devotion to our Lord is possible when little vocal prayer is offered, when few words are said, when we simply keep the same understanding between us.

But how do we maintain the understanding? Is it not by realizing that He is now with us, and that the consummation of life is to be where He is?

WHERE HE IS

There is much truth in the song which says, "I'll go where He wants me to go." But Jesus offers to go with us where we want Him to go. We ask Him to "choose out our path" for us, and He will do it. He wants to do it. He does not offer to take our yoke upon Him, but calls us to take His yoke instead. Yet, He does let us choose out His path for Him here, and goes where His people go. Not that He gives up His will always to us. Sometimes we are about to go where He cannot go without shame and heartache, and then how tenderly He tries to hold us back! How pleadingly He throws His arm about us and whispers to us! Have you never noticed how persistently, almost annoyingly, a line or a stanza of a hymn, or a verse of Scripture, rings in your ears when you are starting astray, or when you are wandering away from your duty?

That is your Companion's voice, beloved, saying, "I am with you; take Me not there; make Me not to go there." But He does not leave us even if we persist in going where it shames Him to go. Perhaps you have been protected and restrained from evil, and do not realize how lovingly the Lord goes with His loved ones even into places of shame. Then hear a story of that love.

It is in a Southern city, and a man has been over-tempted. Seated in a place of sin, with wine and vulgar jest passing about, himself among the bravest and brazenest of all, his fellows see him leap up, gaze around startled, and without ceremony rush from the room out into the night. He flies along the street as though hurried by an omnipotent hand, into his quiet chamber. There the morning hours find him still weeping out his repentance in the ears of One

who had plucked him by the sleeve and dragged him out of sin. He could not tell his pastor what occurred, but something within him seemed to wail like a hurt and shamed companion, and it seemed to him so shameful that he had brought Him there—Him who had loved purity and godliness more than life, Him who had made heaven attractive by promising that His servant should be with Him—so shameful that he could not bear it a moment longer.

Sometimes this loving Companion waits long before He is recognized. Just the other day a man approaching his seventieth year, who had been straying away from his Lord for full forty years, remarked to me how he had never been given up. His Master had been asserting Himself all the time. He had wandered in many places; had been where his

Master must have been pained to go, had fallen to depths where his Master must have been deeply shamed, but he had never been forsaken. The voice of pleading had not been silenced. He had drifted far, but never "beyond His love and care."

. . . . . .

There is much comfort in this thought of the persistent purpose of Jesus to be where we are. An old philosopher taught that God created man because among all His other creatures none could come into personal relationship with Him and He was lonely for companionship. That is fanciful. Does it not, however, suggest what we know is true, that Jesus finds such joy in our companionship here that He would be on the earth lonely without it, as we would be lonely in heaven if He were not there?

But may we not flatter ourselves

unduly with the thought that Jesus wants so much to be with us? Perhaps we might, but there are two reasons for His being with us, which will humble us again.

First, He is with us to help us. It is just because we are so weak and impotent of ourselves and have no self-sufficiency that He presses on with us. Shall a cripple feel flattered and proud on his own account, because a strong man walks by him, keeping him where he could not go alone? It is our helplessness that commends us to God. You remember that great verse of promise wherein Jesus says, "Lo, I am with you alway." Well, just before it, He said, "All power is given unto Me." As though He would say: "I know the work I give you is too much for you; I know the life I offer is too hard for you; I know the service I demand is too great for you;

but look to Me; I have all authority, I can bid your foes depart or submit. Since all power is Mine and you need Me so much, I am with you alway." You see it is a promise based on our weakness. We would be strange folk if we read it backwards and saw in it a tribute to our worth!

Why does Jesus promise to be with you to-day, my brother? Is it not because He would give you strength and grace where your office-work or your labor becomes wearing and exhausting? There are problems for you to solve to-day—"He is made unto us wisdom." There are old sins that you would gladly forget, but they will stare at you to-day out of accusing eyes—"He is made unto us righteousness." There are faults that will catch you unawares and stain the whiteness of your life —"He is made unto us sanctifica-

tion." There are habits that bind you down to an unworthy life—"He is made unto us redemption."

And you, Christian mother, why does your Master promise to be with you to-day? Is it not to remind you that you are dependent on Him? Days are dreary enough when you leave Him out, and He has a way of helping through the most annoying hours. That is a remarkable phrase: "The patience of Christ." You mothers need Him with you that you may have His patience when little ones are cross and teasing. You need the fairness of Jesus with household help that will blunder and fail. You need the kindliness of Jesus to carry you through annoying social duties. It is because you need and have not this strength that Jesus presses along day by day with you. Let it make us all humble and glad.

The other reason why Jesus wants

to be with us is that He must somehow make us fit to be with Him after a while. Have you ever thought of the kindliness of His word to the dying thief: "To-day shalt thou be *with me* in Paradise"? Of course, He might have sent the newly redeemed man on ahead into the joyful companionships, might have told him he should be with Abraham and David and Isaiah. But what a sea of strange faces would be there! How unfamiliar it would seem! And how much sweeter the promise that he should be introduced into the unaccustomed presence by the One whom he already knew and loved! Jesus does not allow us to come to that eternal companionship with Him until He teaches us what it means. There is no way by which we can learn it but by His companionship with us. Some one asked a philologist how we learn to talk. He

replied, "By talking." We learn to be with Jesus by being with Him. This earthly walk with Him is His training course wherein He gets us ready for our eternal life—the life where we shall be where He is.

III

THE PERSONAL VALUE OF BEING WHERE HE IS

"We shall be like Him."

THINK what effect that being with Christ must have on our characters. Holiness develops by contact. The very presence of a good man makes men better. There are birds so sensitive to their enemies that they feel their presence before they can see them. Sometimes waifs are made heroes by being brought out of low surroundings and into contact with large hearts and broad lives. You remember how Garfield felt about Mark Hopkins, that merely being with him was an education. Of the founder of a western college

it was once said that no man could ever go quite to the bad after a year under his influence.

But what will it be to be in constant contact with Jesus? His nobility will lift us out of our meanness. His goodness will burn out our badness. His brightness will shame away our dim righteousness. Ah, best of all, that vision of Him and contact with Him will transform us into His likeness!

This morning, as I look out of my window, the snow is falling so heavily that distant outlines are all obscured. Generally I can see the gaunt, ragged trees across yonder on the hillside. Generally the stony roadway up the hill, the deep-cut waterway by it and the washed-out runs are in plain view. But now they are all covered with a mantle of clear white. At first I said, "It is like the robe of Christ's righteous-

ness." That covers the roughness and gashes of our lives and characters, and presents us to the eye of the beholder beautiful and spotless. Sometimes we think of that word about presenting us faultless before the Father, and of that other about our appearing without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and suppose they promise that we are to be covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness as the snow covers the trees and the ruts and makes them appear beautiful.

But the more I have looked out at the morning snow-blanket, the more I have rejoiced that it is not a symbol of the higher fact; for under the snow still lie all the stones and the ruts and the blackness unchanged. It is only to the eye that they are hid. The righteousness of Christ is not only a robe that hides our faults; it is also a life that runs through us

and corrects the faults that mar us. We are not to enter the presence of God with our sin merely covered, as David once expresses it. Rather, it is to be taken from us. The snow has not changed the hillside yonder. Our contact with Jesus is to work a transformation, not upon us, but in us.

What else does it mean to say: "And hath made us *meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light"? We could have been made partakers by a mere fiat of God, no doubt, but no mere fiat could make us *fit* to be partakers. That must be wrought in us by transforming us and making us like Christ in our very life. His being with us is His way of working in us the transformation.

Years ago some one told me this parable-story. Two bits of charcoal lay in the road one day, while a royal company passed by. They

noticed a diamond set in the coronet of the prince who led the company, and knew it for a brother of their own, since it was but carbon, as were they. Both remarked upon the fact that they were condemned to spend their lives on the highway, and wished that they too might adorn a king's brow. A fairy heard their complaint and asked what each wished. One said quickly, "Place me by my brother yonder on the coronet." Immediately it was done; but a courtier noted it and asked his master to let him brush away the bit of dirt that had lodged above his brow, and presently the charcoal fell again to the ground. The other said, "Make me a diamond like my brother in the crown," and the same courtier leaped from his horse and bore the new-found gem to his master with joy. And the king said, "Set it in the front of my crown."

WHERE HE IS

You must have heard it many times, but we cannot learn the lesson too clearly—that much of the joy of being where He is will lie in being fit to be with Him. He does not take us, worthless, debased, sinful, stained, and usher us into royal presence. He does not even cast over sin-marked shoulders and withered arms, His beautiful mantle of righteousness. No, He makes us through and through and in very truth *fit* for that presence.

. . . . . .

But, beloved, how shall He do this marvellous work unless we will allow Him to be much with us here? Suppose we do not open our hearts to Him; suppose we leave Him out of our thoughts and purposes—can He then impress upon us His own beauty? Or can He then work in us His own character?

I remarked once to a friend that I

would like to meet a certain influential teacher. He replied that I had met him already a dozen times, because I had met his pupils and he had a knack of duplicating himself in them. He overpowered them, made them think his thoughts, made them accept his philosophy, made them adopt his theories. Which can hardly be a safe thing for us humans, but which suggests the wonderful possibility of our Teacher duplicating Himself in us, His scholars in life's school. He will not run us all in the same mould and bring us to a dead level, but He will make us over into His own likeness by ennobling us and culturing us. And He will do it by being with us, and keeping us where He is.

IV

LIFE CONSUMMATED IN BEING WHERE HE IS

"We shall see Him as He is."

At the end of one of his plays Sheridan wrote, "Finished, thank God! Amen!" Not quite so can we feel about the ending of life. The presence of Jesus with us here makes life a royal pleasure. The Christian wants to live, wants to labor, wants to suffer with Christ. "Unto you it is given (as a great privilege) not only to believe on His name, but also to suffer with Him." We must not lessen the joy of present life by thought of the greater joy of heaven. Phillips Brooks used to tell his near friends that he awoke every morning

with a sense of keen joy in the thought of the labor which he should that day perform. This is still God's world and He walks with us here.

But after we have served Him here according to the will of God, and must lay down our earthly life, can we not say of that in true sense: "Finished, thank God!" It will carry us along the path of Him who cried down to earth and up to heaven: "It is finished." When it is finished we can thank God, for we shall be where He is.

Some one sent me a paper a while ago that told of a young man so injured that he suffered intense agony and could not live. A watcher said to him, "Tom, my lad, thou art going to die." He replied, and his face was as of one who saw the invisible, "No, Hannah, not going to die—going to live, for he

that believeth in Jesus shall never die."

What else does the Book mean in saying that God's people only fall asleep? It was a quaint meaning some one got out of the old English expression about Stephen: "He fell on sleep." "Yes, he fell on sleep, and before he had time to cry like a hurt child, his Father had gathered him up in his arms." Dying is being gathered up in the Father's arms. It is going out to meet the Master's promise that we shall be where He is.

. . . . . .

Pastors are often asked whether they think we shal. know our friends in heaven. A mother tells me she is haunted with a strong desire to enter heaven where her little one is and with a great dread at the same time lest she may not know her. I heard one man, who believed in recogni-

tion in heaven, say that he thought it was not a very important matter, since he should want to have the first million years for looking at Jesus. Many of us, however, would be desolate at thought of eternity if it did not contain those whom we "have loved long since and lost a while." Well, be sure it does contain them.

What would be the advantage of being where He is, if we do not know Him? And we are to see Him face to face. If our eyes are cleared for that vision of joy, shall we not also see clearly the love-light in familiar eyes?

It is restful to any one who has been struggling with the complex expressions of philosophy to read the simple statement of Jesus regarding the future life. He uses the personal pronouns, "where *I* am"—a Person here on the earth and still a

Person beyond the earth. "There *ye* may be" persons here, persons there. No loss of personality, no swallowing up of ourselves in a mass, no passing out into nothingness. No, here is Person with person, and the relation will be just as real and definite and natural as the relation between you and the friend to whom you are now reading these lines or to whom you last spoke.

One of our later songs says: "I shall know Him by the print of the nails in His hands." It is a tender thought, but there is yet a tenderer one. We shall know Him rather by the love-light in His eyes. Once Jesus "looked upon Peter," and the look broke him down so that he went out and wept bitterly—poor, sinning Peter! But when the glory breaks on us and in presence of the throne the Savior looks upon us, it will mean outbursting joy and eternal

happiness. We shall not need any one to tell us who He is. Thomas thought he might not recognize Jesus after His resurrection, and talked a little about needing evidence. Before the evidence could be presented, the very sight of Jesus won his recognition and he claimed Him as Lord and God. Timid Christians sometimes fear that heaven may be strange to them, forgetting that they shall know their Master as soon as they see Him, and, because they know Him, shall be at home.

Do you recognize that expression, "at home," as one of Paul's phrases? In one of his letters he says he does not know what he wants to do, to remain in the body or to be absent from the body and "at home with the Lord." Now, is a man ever "at home" with a person whom he does not know? Will heaven be home to

us if we do not know our Lord? and if we know Him, why shall we not know also those who have gone before us and shall come after us? They, as ourselves, will be changed from glory into glory, transformed into His likeness, but still themselves, with all that makes them unlike Him taken away, and all that makes them like Him brought out into new beauty. Be sure we shall know them, since we know Him.

. . . . . .

In this is life's consummation. It needs no other. A few years here in which He walks with us; then an eternity in which we walk with Him. May the dear Savior and Master of us all bring us in His own good time to that home which is Home because it is where He is.

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